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# TOUL

BY BURGESS JOHNSON

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STEADFAST the hills of Toul,  
 Ever to northward gazing,  
 Stand with a warrior's pride,  
 Unsleping, steady eyed,  
 Over the broken plain their serried heads upraising.

Ancient, unwavering, armored from greave to helm,  
 Mighty as Right, and uncompromising as Truth;  
 Sternly you challenge each foe that would overwhelm,—  
 Yet gather about your armor the warm green togas of youth.  
 Drawn to the friendly shadow where the hems of your garments are  
 reaching,  
 Assemble the children of men, your wardenship shyly beseeching.  
 Timorous in their mortality they have thronged to the feet of the hills,  
 And your quiet immutable courage has nurtured their puny wills.

Towering twin spires pointing God-ward,  
 They alone, mighty hills, scarcely heed you,—  
 They seem in their faith not to need you,  
 But have 'stablished their gentle rule  
 Over the age-tinted roofs of the city of Toul.

Breached are the circling walls, crumbled and broken down,  
 Where the errorless guns of Time have battered the ancient town;  
 Bridging deep moats with the dust of eroding centuries past,  
 With fetters of root and vine binding each drawbridge fast.  
 And the hoary watch-towers stand facing across the keep,  
 Their eyelids filmed with moss and closed in a dreamless sleep.  
 Time bears no withered grudge, but is proven a kindly foe  
 Who smiles on the broken toys of the foemen of long ago.

He has seen them playing their games of war and harked to their  
 battle calls,  
 And marked them scooping their moats of sand and rearing their  
 pebble walls.  
 And he decks them now with his living wreaths, and leaves them  
 beautified  
 As monuments whereon men may gaze with a cleansed and worthy  
 pride.

Beyond the ancient city walls green undulating farm lands reach,  
 Fields that have cherished all who toiled, and granted simple gain to  
 each.

Here peaceful folk, who yet have formed stern ranks in war have  
 steeled their wills ;

A gentle folk, who yet have proved a kinship to their steadfast hills.  
 And here amid their shattered homes the ready-handed women toil,  
 And delve or reap, all undismayed, to keep the faith with their own  
 soil ;

Though it be plowed as hell is plowed, nor ever granted any rest,  
 Though day by day sees deeper wounds disfiguring its generous breast ;  
 And suns shine kindly on a foe who spares not fane nor ancient rune,  
 And Death flies over in the night, directed by the traitorous moon.

Stern sentries ribbed and girt with rock ; though old as Time, still  
 standing fast,

Are these fresh scars in roof and field a proof you fail your trust  
 at last ?

Moon mistress, here your lover-city lies,  
 Weary of war, and seeks an hour for dreams ;  
 Sleeping he smiles 'neath your caressing beams—  
 Is there another lovelier in your eyes ?  
 Oh calm Delilah in your white nun's garb,  
 What wanton's bribe has bought your soul away ?  
 You lead the mad assassin to his prey  
 And guide the flight of that death-dealing barb.  
 You could betray him—he who couched his lance  
 As champion of beauty all his days.  
 You seem alight with faith. Yet as I gaze  
 Your light reveals the gaping wounds of France.

Twin spires of Toul, fretted against the sky—  
 A spirit-city's upward pointing fingers—  
 You tell of faith unwavering, still held high  
 Despite that Judas one whose pale light lingers  
 Upon your pinnacles. Not even Time  
 Has touched your forms in aught save love and awe.

And from your courtyard throbs a steady rime—  
From feet of those that come to learn your law.  
I hear them singing there within your door,—  
Men from the gun-pit, women from the plow.  
I hear your bells ring clearly as of yore  
With tongues that never sang so sweet as now.  
Fled is the foeman, faded every danger,  
Gone is the blighting threat of foul misrule.  
“We are Truth”, the hills shout;  
“We are Faith”, the bells sing,  
Clanging their song above the clustered roofs of Toul.

BURGES JOHNSON.